

Can Iraq democratize? How long will it take?

Abstract:

The title questions are surely among the most significant on the agenda of contemporary scholars of international relations and national security. Social scientists can and should address such policy-relevant questions with the same rigorous methods that they routinely apply to theory testing. This paper assesses prospects for democracy in Iraq in light of the historical precedents of nations with comparable experiences. That analysis reveals that:

- (1) Since the end of the 19th century, only 30 nations have experienced an autocracy as extreme as Iraq's over as long a time.
- (2) Only nine of those 30 have produced coherent democracies subsequently.
- (3) Only two of those nine are now established democracies; the remainder's democratic experiments are still in progress.
- (4) The average time required for these nine prospects to transit the path from extreme autocracy to coherent, albeit precarious, democracy has been about 50 years and only two have managed it in less than 25 years.
- (5) Iraq lacks the structural conditions that theory and evidence indicate have been necessary for successful democratic transitions in the past.

Thus, the odds of Iraq achieving democracy in the next quarter-century are quite close to zero, at best about 2 in 30, but probably far less. The past experience of Middle Eastern countries suggests that when democracy finally comes to Iraq, few Iraqis alive today will be there to greet it.

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Security Studies submission

Can Iraq democratize? How long will it take?

"Democracy's hard. It's tough stuff,
and it takes time." – Donald Rumsfeld¹

1. Introduction

The title questions were elevated to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda when President Bush declared from the deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003 that

“The transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time, but it is worth every effort. Our coalition will stay until our work is done. Then we will leave, and we will leave behind a free Iraq.”

More than three years later, a realistic assessment of the likely political future in Iraq is scarcely less critical to charting a course for U.S. policy. However, the pronouncements of policymakers have been riddled with contradictions and vagaries that do little to specify the duration of the “hard journey” said to be required: Declarations that “Iraq is now free” appear in the same speeches as warnings that “democracy will take time,” and that “it will not happen over night”. Such open-ended projections, equally compatible with interpretations ranging from months to centuries, provide too little guidance for the serious assessment of policy options.

These questions have attracted the opinions of pundits as well as policymakers.² For the most part, however, they have cited neither well-established theories of democratization nor rigorous social science evidence to support their views. Scholars have an obligation to address these policy-relevant questions, but thus far the effort has been carried largely by journalists who monitor day-to-day dynamics and by area scholars who offer regional expertise.³ A comparative, theoretically-informed empiricism has been notably absent.

The result is confusion about both Iraq’s present accomplishments and its future course.

¹ “Rumsfeld Warns Iraq's Neighbors Against Aiding Zarqawi” David Stout, *NY Times*, June 1, 2005.

² Opinions range from Anthony Cordesman, quoted in *USA Today* 11 November 2002, “The notion that Iraq will suddenly emerge as a stable democracy and will change the rest of the Arab world crosses the line between neo-conservative and neo-crazy,” to Colin Powell’s (2002) “We reject the condescending notion that freedom will not grow in the Middle East or that there is any region of the world that cannot support democracy.”

³ Articles on democracy in the Middle East number in the hundreds. For example, see Wimmer (2003) on the ethno-religious dimension, Nikash (2003) on the Shiites, Duffield (2005) on oil, and Diamond (2004) on the American occupation. The immediate way forward for U.S. policy has also been addressed by innumerable works, including Bergen and Reynolds (2005), Biddle (2006), and Krepinevich (2005).

Elections are lauded as symbolic of the arrival of democracy, but every democratic theorist agrees that there is far more to democracy than elections. The courageous voter turnout of the Iraqi people is said to signal the triumph of democracy, but history shows that it has never been the unwillingness to vote that has prevented democracy, but rather the failure to honor the results of those elections.⁴ An Iraqi-headed government may embody sovereignty, but scholars of democracy are unanimous that the tricky part of maintaining the monopoly on the legitimate use of force lies not in creating instruments of power, but instead in constraining its illegitimate exercise. That requires a web of respected institutions, mobilized interests, and deeply-rooted values, not foreign armies. Immediate problems – forming a government, holding an election, or maintaining security – have been addressed as if their resolution would be decisive in engineering a democratic Iraq, without consulting the historical record of democratization elsewhere.

This paper seeks to fill these gaps by fashioning a working hypothesis out of theory and evidence culled from the past experience of similar states. Its motivation rests on the conviction that analysts should take into account the details that make Iraq unique only in concert with a generalization of the title questions.⁵ “Will Iraq democratize?” is better answered after considering “Have other nations with Iraq’s experience become democratic?” “How long will it take?” surely requires one to ask “How long has it taken for similar nations?”

We identify cases comparable to Iraq based upon two simple intuitions. First, the more autocratic the nation, the longer it will take to achieve democracy. Second, the more prolonged the autocracy, the more difficult and protracted any democratic transition will be. The next section of the paper begins by exploring the theoretical reasoning that informs the central expectation: that extreme and long-established autocracies transit to democracy only over long expanses of time. The third section introduces a metric that will enable us to compile a list of states comparable to Iraq in the intensity and duration of their autocratic experience. We then use that measure in section four to summarize the experience of those nations subsequent to their

⁴ “The problem is not to hold elections but to create organizations.” Huntington (1968: 7). Welzel et al. (2003) demonstrate that individual-level expressions of support for democracy are only weakly linked with societal-level democracy.

⁵ These would include security problems, ethnic conflicts, regional complications, cultural predilections, and external involvement. A good example of such an ideographic approach is Haradstveit and Hveem (2005). Blueprints for the design of a democratic system include Dawisha and Dawisha (2003) and Lawson (2003).

extreme autocratic periods. In section five, we move beyond historical comparison to a theory-driven structural analysis designed to determine whether conditions in Iraq are more similar to those established autocracies that have democratized or to those that have not. In the process, the central claim is tested in an alternative way and the effect of American military occupation is assessed. Section six produces a composite projection based upon both the structural analysis and historical experience.

2. Why privilege historical prediction?

Previous theory advances a wealth of factors that affect democratic prospects, and any of them could be used to identify nations comparable to Iraq. Indeed, section five employs one variant of that approach. Because our principal interest lies in forecasting rather than theory testing, however, the main analysis relies on a conclusion that is undisputed in the empirical literature: the best prediction of a nation's level of democracy is its past level (Gleditsch and Ward, 1997; O'Loughlin et al, 1998; Feng and Zak, 1999; Scarritt et al., 2001; Moon et al., 2006; Foweraker and Landman, 2004). This finding of a strong serial correlation is validated by original analyses below, but we begin by elucidating why, despite theoretical differences, most accounts agree that democratization is a necessarily slow process characterized by hysteresis, a physics term that means, literally, to be late. It describes systems that react slowly and at a lag to the forces applied to them, so that they depend on past history as well as current forces.⁶

Structural explanations, whether in the modernization or dependency traditions, contend that democratization unfolds slowly because it requires complex, multi-faceted evolution in the political, social, and economic realms. This approach invariably identifies relatively enduring national qualities as requisites of democracy: income level and economic structure, class structure and inequality, education, colonial legacy, dependency, geographic region, religion, and ethnic divisions (Lipset, 1959, 1994; Moore, 1966; Bollen, 1983; Inglehart, 1988; Burkhart & Lewis-Beck, 1994; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997; Przeworski et. al., 2000;

⁶ Hysteresis is used especially to denote systems that do not return completely to their original state after a disturbance has been removed. For instance if you push on a piece of putty it will assume a new shape, but when you remove your hand it will not return to its original shape entirely or quickly. Political systems are like that: Saddam Hussein's hand will affect the shape of Iraqi governance long after his direct influence has ended.

Doorenspleet, 2004).

Actor-oriented explanations that attribute greater importance to elite behavior see democratic possibilities in a broader range of circumstances, but they are scarcely more optimistic concerning the time frame required (Kitschelt, 1992, O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). They generally portray democratic transitions as staged processes that begin with a democratic opening (i.e. the breakdown of an authoritarian regime), then register a democratic breakthrough, and conclude with democratic consolidation (Carothers, 2002). While the first two of these stages can usually be identified as discrete events triggered by identifiable agents, democratic consolidation – “the process by which a newly established democratic regime becomes sufficiently durable that a return to nondemocratic rule is no longer likely” – is inherently a longer-term proposition (Gasiorowski and Power, 1998: 740).⁷

From the standpoint of either of these schools of thought it is not hard to see why rapid democratization is rare.⁸ Democratic consolidation must take time because the conditions necessary for it are themselves the outcomes of protracted processes (Linz and Stepan, 1996). First, a minimally competent and effective state must hold power and monopolize the legitimate means of violence within identified borders. To do so, it must dominate the military, competing groups, and other authoritarian enclaves. It must extend its rule across the country, extracting resources necessary for its operation, delivering services, and maintaining order. This requires the construction of bureaucracies, the authoring of legislation and administrative rules, the recruitment and training of personnel, etc. When few officials carry over from the previous regime, staffing these agencies with technocratic, management, and political experience is itself a long-term project. This is the monumental task barely underway now in Iraq, most visibly in the areas of security and utility service provision. Daunting as it is, it constitutes merely state-

⁷ This is also where most transitions break down: Power and Gasiorowski (1997) report that nearly a third of Third World democracies collapse before the first (post-founding) election, about half before the first change in power has been effected, and more than 60% within 12 years. See Pevehouse (2002) and Diskin et al. (2005) for the determinants of democratic collapse.

⁸ A third theoretical approach to democratization, which emphasizes diffusion, is ambiguous as to speed but selective in the circumstances under which democracy is likely (Starr, 1991; Starr and Lindborg, 2003; O'Loughlin et al., 1998; Gleditsch and Ward, 2000). The undemocratic “neighborhood” surrounding Iraq precludes democratization through the diffusion channel. Another literature finds that short-term economic downturns destabilize all governments, but do not necessarily bring democracy (Gasiorowski, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2003).

building, a necessary *forerunner* to democracy-building.

The manifest inability of the Iraqi state to exercise control belies the claim that Iraq should be considered democratic because elections have been successfully conducted. Until the state is providing all the services and functions expected of government, unaided by outside forces, no assessment of a system's level of democracy can be meaningful. By definition, a democratic government must actually be governing. In practice, the gravest threats to democracy occur when the state attempts to balance these governance challenges with the constraints imposed by the democratic principles discussed below. For example, it is relatively easy to provide security or to respect civil liberties, but devilishly difficult to do both at the same time.

Second, the state must assume a democratic form in which executive power is subordinated to the rule of law. Incentives for law-based behavior must be institutionalized and elites must be habituated to honoring the constraints they impose. Mechanisms and procedures must be empowered to keep office holders accountable to the public will and some agency must arise to animate them. Norms of compromise among elites must be internalized as well as externally enforced by some system of checks and balances. Such attitudes are not native to all political cultures, they are selected against by autocratic environments, and the institutions that embody them do not arise naturally (Waterbury, 1999).

Third, mass attitudes and habits must be developed to demand popular consent and to reward it with citizen cooperation. The democratic state (and usually its embodiment in a constitution) must command the loyalty of the population, even when citizens disapprove of policies, doubt the officials that adopt them, and lament the outcomes they generate. The near-unanimously perceived legitimacy of the state must become its central resource, but such political capital accumulates much more slowly through performance and precedent than does the attachment to charismatic autocratic personalities or identity-based allegiances. All evidence indicates that Iraqi security forces today feel greater loyalty to ethnic groups and their militias than to the government.

Fourth, civil society (e.g. independent media) and "political society" (e.g. political parties) must flourish if democratic norms are to guide political and social behavior (Diamond, 1994). Policy dissent must be tolerated and authority challenges must be protected. Elections must be made meaningful by wide-spread, well-informed political participation. To achieve stability that

participation must be motivated at least as much by negotiable policy preferences as by the polarizing rigidity of group identity or personal loyalty that mark most immature political systems. The dominant showing of religious and ethnic parties in the most recent Iraqi elections greatly weakened the secular forces most likely to produce democratic compromise.

These requirements explain why democratic change is either incremental or subject to reversal when it is not. They also lead us to expect that democracy will arise much less frequently and be consolidated much more slowly in nations like Iraq that have experienced extreme autocracy for an extended period. Of course, no set of past cases can ever definitively predict the future of a current one, because there are always unique attributes that make the parallels imperfect. Rather than *beginning* with this “impossibility theorem”, however, we address the objections to generalization in a later section.

3. What nations compare with Iraq? Defining “established extreme autocracy”

The first step toward establishing the roster of nations that may provide insight into Iraq’s future is to characterize political systems in a way that facilitates comparison. The most recent data set of the Polity project is the obvious choice (Jagers and Gurr, 1995).⁹ We rely on Polity IV’s often-used 21 point scale of institutionalized democracy, which subtracts a 10 point autocracy scale from a 10 point democracy scale to yield a continuous measure in which pure autocracy is scored -10 and full democracy +10. The democracy/autocracy conceptions of Polity, rooted in the theoretical work of Eckstein and Gurr (1975) on authority relations, emphasize the range of political participation in the recruitment of the chief executive and the extent of constraints on executive power. In fully democratic systems, chief executives are elected in open, formal competition by broad electorates, and, once in office, are heavily constrained by statutory

⁹ Polity is widely regarded as the most reliable and valid of the available data sets and it offers the greatest coverage, encompassing nearly 200 countries for each year between 1800 and 2004 (Munck and Verkulin, 2002; Moon et al., 2006). Its conception of democracy is unusually well documented via the writings of its founders, its exemplary codebook, and other materials (Gurr, 1974; Marshall and Jagers, 2002; <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/>). There are, of course, many alternative data sets on democracy, each utilizing its own definition of democracy, but we need not probe more deeply the fine points of the various conceptions of democracy or the techniques for measuring it: All agree that Iraq belongs in the most autocratic category (Alvaraz et al., 1996; Coppedge and Reinicke, 1991; Gasiorowski, 1996; Moon et al., 2006; Vanhanen, 2000).

limitations and by other actors (especially elected legislatures). In pure autocracies, political participation is repressed, and chief executives with unlimited authority appropriate power directly or are designated by a closed group. For readers unfamiliar with the Polity data, the meaning of these elements is clarified in the Appendix, which applies its coding rules to Iraq and other autocracies.¹⁰

To make concrete the title question, “Can Iraq democratize?”, we adopt the criteria of a Polity score of +7 or more, which recognizes a “coherent democracy, with institutionally strong, or internally consistent, authority patterns”.¹¹ Coherent democracies are more stable and enduring than incoherent polities, which have substantial features of both democracy and autocracy and are coded between +6 and -6. (Gurr, 1974; Harmel, 1980; Lichbach, 1984; Jagers and Gurr, 1995).¹² Polity regards nations scored at -7 and below “coherent autocracies”.

To isolate nations most like Iraq, we add the category of *extreme* autocracies – those coded at -9 or -10. In 2004, there were seven of them: two “pure autocracies” scored at -10 (Saudi Arabia and Qatar), plus Iraq and four others coded -9 (North Korea, Swaziland, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan), but different only in that they lack a hereditary monarchy. Polity actually assigned no score to Iraq in 2003-4 since it was under foreign domination, but for convenience we refer to it hereafter by the -9 score it held from 1978 through 2002.

To illustrate how these seven *extreme* autocracies are distinct from other coherent

¹⁰ To minimize doubts about the coding of individual cases, Polity is augmented whenever possible with textual references to Freedom House’s (2006) ratings, which are available only since 1972 but have been updated through 2005. The Freedom House conception of “freedom” is more eclectic than Polity’s emphasis on democratic institutions and empirically more sensitive to civil liberties. Yet, the two theoretically different data sets are in close empirical agreement – 83% of the variance in one is shared by the other (Moon et al., 2006).

¹¹ The standard for “coherent democracy” can be signified by a simple denotation: for 2004, the latest year available, those making the “cut” at +7 include Turkey, Russia, Georgia, Colombia, El Salvador, Madagascar, Honduras, Croatia, and Albania. Those falling just short at +6 include Bangladesh, Venezuela, Malawi, Ukraine, Serbia/Montenegro, Ecuador, Estonia, Namibia, Benin, Mali, Mozambique, Comoros, Fiji, Guyana, and East Timor.

¹² As will become clear, lowering the bar from Polity’s recommendation (+7) to +6, +5, or even +4 affects very few cases. The +7 standard has been used frequently in studies examining various consequences of democracy relevant to declared U.S. interests, especially in the “democratic peace” literature (Rousseau et al., 1996; Keller, 2005). Other plausible cut-off points would incline the analysis toward greater pessimism. Dahl (1998) argues that +8 is more appropriate and Davenport and Armstrong (2004) find that human rights are much better upheld at +8 and above. The most authoritative study on the diffusion of democracy – a key issue for the Bush initiative to spread democracy in the Middle East – also uses +8 (O’Loughlin et al. (1998). Lai and Slater (2006) use +6, but report that their results would be no different at either +5 or +7.

autocracies, the Appendix decomposes Polity's coding of them and compares it with the far more common profile of autocracies rated -7. In 2004, the best known members of this latter group of thirteen (plus three rated -8) are China, Syria, Zimbabwe, Kuwait and Cuba. The most notable historical cases include the Soviet Union between Stalin and Gorbachaev and almost all of the Eastern European states during the Cold War era.

We expect *extreme* autocracies to yield to democracy less often than other authoritarian systems, because of differences in executive constraints and political participation that are central to the potential for a democratic transition.¹³ In particular, the unlimited power of Iraq's Saddam Hussein contrasts with the greater constraints on executive authority found in less extreme autocracies. (See the Appendix.) Restraints on the chief executive, which imply the existence of competing institutions and elites, provide an important channel of political change (Karl, 1990). As O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986:19) put it, "there is no [democratic] transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself."

Political change in the former USSR illustrates the significance of this effect. The Soviet Union was coded as an extreme autocracy (-9) for slightly under 20 years, ending with the death of Stalin in 1952. With the subsequent return of executive constraints and the end of one man rule, it was considered -7 until Gorbachev's liberalization began in 1987. While the Soviet Union in its last three decades was certainly autocratic, there is little doubt that the USSR was markedly less autocratic than it had been under Stalin and dramatically less autocratic than Iraq. For example, it is hard to imagine the "perestroika" evolution that occurred in the 1980s arising directly out of the Stalin period without the intervening years, during which cracks in the autocracy allowed shoots of proto-democracy to emerge. The more diversified leadership and greater differentiation of power in states with executive constraints breeds a very different pattern of political behavior, and political competition creates a far richer reservoir of experienced personnel to steer the state away from autocratic extremes. For example, in the -7 autocracy of 1987, Boris Yeltsin was demoted from the Politburo for criticizing Gorbachev, but by 1989 he was

¹³ Similarly, Geddes (1999) found significant differences between all authoritarian regimes and a sub-set of "personalist" regimes like Saddam's Iraq.

back in parliament and by 1991 he was influential in the democratization process. Under Stalin or Saddam Hussein (-9), he certainly would have been purged.

Furthermore, because the usually-violent demise of the highly personalist extreme autocracy is tantamount to the utter destruction of the state itself, any succeeding political system lacks the conditions necessary for a successful democratic transition. The absence of competing institutions and elites in extreme autocracies deprives any future regime of experienced personnel, established procedures, the rule of law, and the habits of compromise necessary to build a stable democracy.¹⁴ All of these problems are readily apparent in contemporary Iraq.

The other potential avenue for political change identified in the transitions literature is political participation, which was also unusually sharply constrained under Saddam Hussein. Popular mobilizations cannot arise under severe repression, nor, of course, will extreme autocracies permit the autonomous civil society or political society that could anchor a new democratic system (Geddes, 1994). For example, senior clerics were executed by the Baath government precisely to prevent a religious establishment from challenging the government (Nakash, 2003). The significance of the contrast with a -7 autocracy may be illustrated best by the role played in the democratization of Poland by the Roman Catholic Church and the independent trade union movement Solidarity and its predecessors. It is inconceivable that such elements of civil society could have survived an *extreme* autocracy and equally inconceivable that democratization could have come as quickly as it did to Poland without them.¹⁵

Since actor-oriented theories generally attribute democratic transitions to either elite competition or popular mobilization, extreme autocracies that feature neither must have very poor democratic prospects. Nor will democratic norms and the habit of extending legitimacy to the state exist in an extreme autocracy such as Iraq's. The analysis reported in Table 1 strongly

¹⁴ Geddes (1999:132) finds that personalist regimes hardly ever survive the death of the founder because the most able successors will have been eliminated as a potential rivals, certainly the pattern formed by Saddam Hussein's many purges, which began almost immediately upon his seizure of power. And the violence that usually surrounds the collapse dooms democratic prospects. "Democracies are created by negotiation. It is very rare for them to emerge directly from popular insurgency, rebellion, or civil war."

¹⁵ Islam in Iraq is an intriguing parallel as an institution of civil society, but it does not provide the same unifying nationalism in ethnically fractionalized Iraq that the Catholic Church represented in Poland. Sharp divisions between competing Islamic traditions in Iraq have been exploited by autocrats to prevent challenges going back to Ottoman times, and most studies still expect Islam to retard rather than advance democracy.

confirms the key assumption underlying our historical approach: democratic change is relatively rare and comes most slowly for the most autocratic of states.¹⁶ As shown in the first row, extreme autocracies are extremely unlikely to transition to democracy over any short time frame. Only 1.02% have been able to do so within five years and only about 1 in 14 (7.21%) are coherent democracies even twenty years later. Table 1 also validates the distinction between extreme

	5 years	10 years	20 years
Extreme autocracy (-9/-10)	1.02	2.88	7.21
Other coherent autocracy (-7/-8)	3.96	7.17	13.12
Incoherent polity (+6 to -6)	6.72	11.09	15.22
Coherent democracy (+7 to +10)	90.45	86.92	86.09

autocracies and other coherent autocracies by showing that their trajectory of political change has been quite different. At a lag of five years, for example, nations that had been scored at -7 or -8 are nearly four times as likely to become democratic as are extreme autocracies. They make the democratic transition nearly as often as incoherent polities after 20 years, whereas extreme autocracies remain only about half as likely to have effected such a change.

We postulate that democratic prospects are diminished by both the intensity and the *duration* of a nation's autocracy. *Established* autocracies differ from more fleeting ones because pre-existing proto-democratic elements gradually atrophy and potential democratic leadership inevitably passes from the scene. As the remnants of previous political systems are slowly extinguished, autocratic patterns become more deeply entrenched and democratic transitions face greater obstacles with fewer resources. For example, because most Iraqis who have held office during the last quarter-century have been banned from public service, the officials of the new Iraqi government must be among the least experienced in the world. Most are newcomers to politics, many are newly arrived in Iraq after living abroad for decades, and none have any experience whatsoever in democratically governing Iraq. Marr (2006: 5-8) finds that of Iraq's post-Saddam leaders only 27% were known to be living under Saddam's regime in 2003 whereas 38% were known to be abroad (another 19% were living in the northern Kurdish "free" zone and 16% are of unknown background).¹⁷

¹⁶ The sample includes only cases since the beginning of the twentieth century.

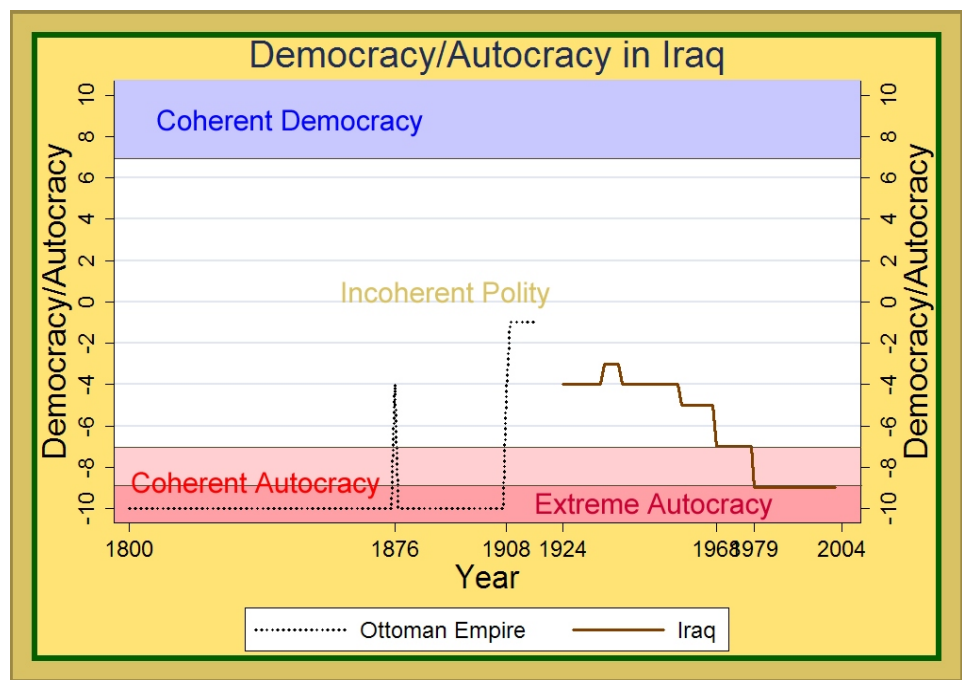
¹⁷ Marr (2006) identifies 97 leaders in three governments: the Iraq Governing Council and the Council of Ministers appointed by the CPA in 2003, the interim government selected after the transfer of sovereignty in 2004, and the government elected in early 2005.

In order to assemble a roster of nations with a political history similar to Iraq’s, we require a length criteria that distinguishes them from nations that have had a more brief brush with autocracy. Unfortunately, the duration of autocracy has not received as much attention in existing literature as has the persistence of democracy. Lijphart (1999) uses a two decade time period to demarcate an “established democracy” and estimates of when a democracy should be considered “consolidated” range anywhere from 12 years (Gasiorowski and Power, 1998) to 25 years (Mainwaring, 1993). We borrow Lijphart’s benchmark to label as “*established extreme autocracies*” nations that have maintained a score of -9 or -10 for twenty years or more. This convenient round number is roughly a full political generation. Since Iraq’s population has a median age of 19.7,

more than half of Iraqis could have known no other regime.

The summary provided by Figure 1 shows that Iraq has been predominantly autocratic – and never democratic – for its entire history.¹⁸ The Ottoman Empire, which was itself a

Figure 1: Iraq’s political history



pure autocracy (-10) for all but a few years, incorporated the territory of modern-day Iraq from the early sixteenth century onward.¹⁹ The three provinces based on the towns of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra were united only by the British occupation post-World War I, after which Iraq emerged

¹⁸ Isakhan (2006) counters that “Primitive Democracy” can be traced as far back as Gilgamesh in 2800 B.C.

¹⁹ After a period of loose and indirect rule through local dynasties, direct Ottoman control was reimposed early in the nineteenth century.

as a -4.²⁰ This absence of democratic history substantially diminishes its future prospects, since Feng and Zak (1999) show that the probability of a democratic transition is five times greater for a country that has experienced democracy in the past, however briefly.

Optimists point out that “democratic institutions are not entirely alien to the country,” but neither have they been extensive or recent. The added italics in the quotation below (Dawisha and Dawisha, 2003:36) indicate just how far from real democracy the monarchy was, a distance that seems quite accurately represented by Polity’s codes during this period: -4 and, briefly, -3.²¹

Under the Hashemite monarchy, which ruled from 1921 until 1958, Iraq adopted a parliamentary system modeled on that of its colonial master, the United Kingdom. Political parties existed, even in the opposition, and dissent and disagreement were *generally tolerated*. Debates in parliament were often vigorous, and legislators were *usually allowed* to argue and vote against the government *without fear of retribution*. Although the palace and the cabinet set the agenda, parliament *often managed to influence policy*.

Conditions deteriorated after the 1958 coup, now nearly half a century ago, as reflected by Polity codes that moved to -5 and, with the coup in 1968, to -7, before reaching -9 with the ascendance of Saddam Hussein in 1979. For these two decades the few trappings of democracy gradually slipped away as various civilian and military groups vied for control of the state in increasingly extra-legal and violent ways amid regional and ethnic revolts, brutal suppressions, and the banning or purging of political parties and military factions. The Ba’thists first came to power in the 1963 coup, then in a more dominant way in the 1968 coup, after which they insured one-party rule with a series of execution of rivals and dissenters. By the mid-1970s, Saddam Hussein was clearly the major force in the government and he became president in 1979.

This “changing of the guard marked a decisive shift, already under way, from a one-party

²⁰ Several dates might be cited for Iraq’s birth as an independent polity. The British seized military control of Basra in 1914, Baghdad in 1917, and Mosul in 1918. Iraq was entrusted to a British mandate by the League of Nations as a separate territory in 1919. After a 1920 revolt, Britain installed Faisal, a non-Iraqi, as monarch in 1921. An elected constituent assembly first met in 1924 and declared Iraqi sovereignty, but the British high commission retained de facto power until the British recognized Iraqi sovereignty in 1932 and Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations. Iraqis usually cite 1921, but Polity uses the 1924 date.

²¹ The monarchy was not even indigenous: King Faisal was a Sunni born in present-day Saudi Arabia as the son of the emir of Mecca and the brother of the future king of Jordan. Briefly king of Syria, Faisal was living in Britain when installed by the British to rule over the majority Shi’ites of Iraq. Britain retained colonial control for more than a decade thereafter, and also installed a pro-British government after regaining military control in 1941.

state to a personal, autocratic regime, dependent ... on Saddam Hussein and his close family members and cohorts... [P]ersonal loyalty became critical. The party was weakened as an institution, and what little pluralism and balance had remained at the top disappeared.” (Marr, 2004: 177) This “personal autocracy focused on one man and his whims ... and the party was reduced to an appendage.” (178) The Polity code of -9, documented further in the Appendix, represented the essence of an extreme autocracy: an unelected, unconstrained chief executive and a virtual absence of political participation, accentuated by the severe repression of civil liberties and political rights reflected in Freedom House’s lowest scores.

Thus, Iraq has known nothing other than an *extreme* autocracy for nearly a quarter-century, during which nearly two-thirds of all living Iraqis were born. A full generation has been deprived of *any* experience that could foster democratic attitudes, develop democratically-inclined leaders, create democratic institutions, or even permit the emergence of proto-democratic civil society. Prospective democracies that arise from established autocracies must begin anew and virtually from scratch. Marr (2006: 7) addresses the significance of the duration of extreme autocracy from the leadership standpoint:

“If we take the age of twenty - a time when people are graduating from college or going to work and are increasingly aware of their political environment – as a threshold of adulthood, at least 57% [and perhaps as much as 82%] of the current leadership came of age after the Ba’th came to power in 1968. Few have much recollection of the pre-Ba’th era.” Among the populace, that number is smaller yet: about one current Iraqi in 20 reached adulthood before the Ba’th and only about 1 in 50 before the 1958 coup. For the half-century before that, the Iraqi government was more foreign than indigenous and more monarchic than democratic.

The criteria of twenty years at a Polity score of -9 or -10 now enables us to identify a manageable list of nations comparable to Iraq. *Since the beginning of the twentieth century, only 30 current nations have endured twenty continuous years of extreme autocracy.*²² The post-World War II cases of democratization are sometimes inaccurately cited as precedents (Byman and Pollack, 2003; Dobbins et al., 2003; Crane and Terrill, 2003)), but they really have radically different histories.²³ Germany’s extreme autocracy was brief (1933-1944) and preceded for a

²² This includes nations whose autocracy began before the twentieth century, but extended into it. It excludes East Germany (-9 from 1960 to 1988), which was incorporated into Germany (+10).

²³ They also had far greater prospects in terms of democratic requisites (Bellin, 2004).

longer period (1919-1932) by the Weimar Republic (+6). It was scored +1 or +2 since 1890. Italy had no democratic tradition, but its extreme autocracy (-9) was also relatively brief (1928-1942) and preceded by two decades of -1. Japan's last coherent autocracy ended in 1857, after which it was coded as more democratic than autocratic (+1) for more than 75 years before 1945.²⁴

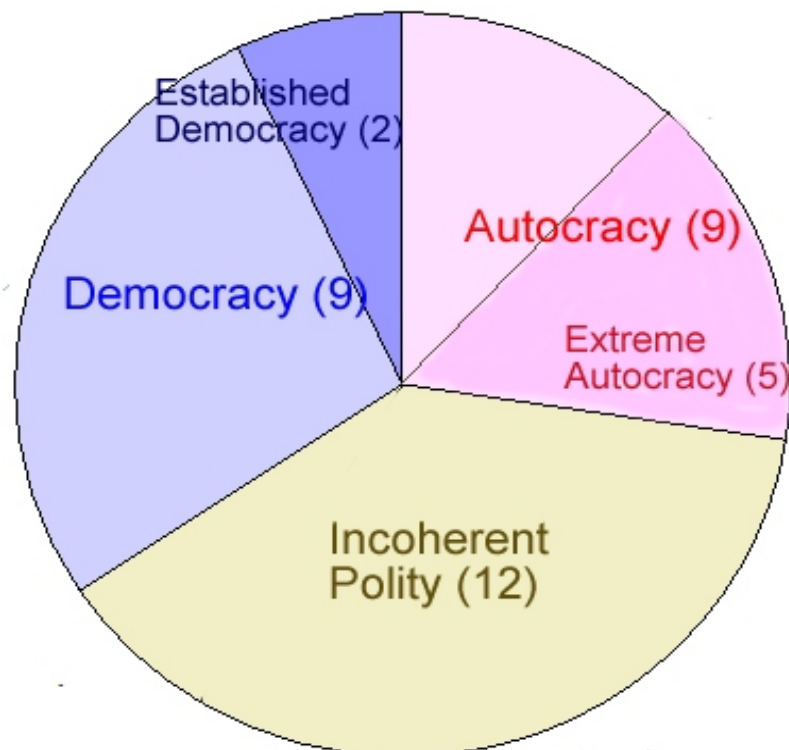
4. What can we expect after established extreme autocracy?

We can now address the question to which we have been building: How have those thirty established extreme autocracies (EEAs) fared? The answer is summarized in Figure 2, elaborated in color-coded Tables 2-4, and discussed below. Nine, including Iraq, remain coherent autocracies, five of them

extreme autocracies.

Twelve are incoherent polities, including three that are not coded by Polity because no fully functioning government exists. Another nine are currently coherent democracies, only two of which have achieved the longevity required to be considered *established* democracies. We discuss each category in turn and explore their implications for Iraq.

Figure 2: Where are they now?
30 Established Extreme Autocracies (EEAs)



²⁴ Closer were the fourteen now-independent nations which endured extreme autocracy as Soviet republics for slightly under 20 years (Xxxx, 2005). Russia itself is included among the thirty on the basis of the extreme autocracy ending in 1904.

Table 2 lists the nine countries which were once EEAs and are now coherent autocracies, including Iraq and the four others that remained *extreme* autocracies in 2004 displayed in dark pink.²⁵ None of the nine offers any optimism for a rapid transformation in Iraq, since all have been autocratic for more than 30 years and three for more than 50 years. Each has dislodged at least one autocrat without escaping autocracy, reminding us that Iraqi autocracy did not begin with Saddam Hussein’s arrival and may well not end with his departure.

The twelve former EEAs listed in Table 3 also challenge expectations for rapid democratization in Iraq. They have escaped from extreme autocracy but

have not emerged as democratic: Polity places nine of them in their middle category of “incoherent polity”

(-6 to +6) as of 2004. We also include Haiti, Ivory

Coast, and Congo here because they lack coherent governmental rule amid wide-spread violence, though they are formally designated “interregnum” by Polity.²⁶ As can be seen from their most recent

Polity scores, most of these twelve are far closer to autocracy than democracy, with only Malawi, Algeria, and Ethiopia registering

positive scores. The picture is even bleaker according to the ratings by Freedom House, which are depicted in Table 3 transformed to conform with the Polity scale.²⁷ Freedom House considers seven of

these nations “not free” and the other five only “partly free”. Not a single one has a positive score that would signify it as closer to

democracy than autocracy.

Table 2: 9 EEAs, now coherent autocracies

Years autocratic*	
Iraq	37
Qatar	34
North Korea	57
Saudi Arabia	79
Swaziland	32
Bhutan	98
Syria	42
Bahrain	34
Oman	48

* as of 2004

Table 3: 12 EEAs, now incoherent polities

Current status	End of Last Established Extreme Autocracy		
	Polity	Freedom House	
Yemen	-2	-3	1945
Ethiopia	+1	-3	1973
Iran	-6	-7	1905/1978
Nepal	-6	-3	1980
Guinea	-1	-5	1983
Haiti	...	-8	1985*
Jordan	-2	-2	1988
Algeria	+2	-5	1988
Ivory Coast	...	-7	1989
Gabon	-4	-2	1989
Congo (Kin)	...	-7	1991
Malawi	+6	0	1992

*once coherent democracy

²⁵ All nine continue to be rated “not free” by Freedom House through 2005 as well.

²⁶ In a practical sense, they are as far from democracy as are the coherent autocracies, as indicated by the “not free” designations assigned by Freedom House. Congo’s last coherent polity, 1991, was -8. Ivory Coast earned a +4 briefly during 2000 and 2001, but has otherwise lingered at -6 or -7 since 1990. Haiti’s most recent Polity score was a -2 in 2003.

²⁷ Freedom House uses two 1-7 indexes for political rights and civil liberties, in which the *lower* numbers are more democratic. Thus, to avoid confusion and achieve comparability with Polity in Table 3, their indexes are mapped to Polity’s -10 to +10 scale using the formula $14.32 - 1.70*(FH_{pol} + FH_{civ})$ and rounding downward. That formula is derived from a regression which accounted for 82% of the variance over the 4823 cases for which data exists on both.

Nor have they shown the kind of progress over the last decade that inspires confidence in the future. According to Polity, only Algeria is more democratic in 2004 than it was in 1995, whereas several were less democratic. Freedom House sees four of the twelve marginally more free in 2005 than in 1995 but seven are less free, several of which have experienced quite large drops.

The last column of Figure 3 also may provide some hints concerning the future for Iraq by registering the year when each nation exited extreme autocracy. Yemen has failed to achieve democracy despite leaving extreme autocracy 60 years ago (in 1945) and five others have been languishing as incoherent polities for more than 20 years. The remainder are about midway through their second decade with little forward progress visible, a caution against the belief that democratization has become dramatically easier since the advent of the “Third Wave” (Huntington, 1991).

Haiti, which had once achieved democracy, but has subsequently relapsed, is a cautionary tale that returns us to concerns about protracted democratic consolidation. It reached +7 in 1990 and from 1994-1998, but had regressed to -2 by 2000.²⁸ Initial achievement of democracy by no means guarantees a democratic future, a judgment reinforced by a count of the 98 countries that have had a coherent democracy at one time or another since the beginning of the twentieth century. Nearly half (43) subsequently lost their democratic status, seven of them more than once. Only 18 of those 43 are democratic today, and a third of those 18 failed on two occasions before achieving a more lasting democracy.

Finally, Table 4 lists the relevant dates for the nine established extreme autocracies that were coherent democracies in Polity terms as of 2004, only four of which are also regarded as “free” by Freedom House.²⁹ This group is ostensibly the basis for optimism in Iraq, but that judgment may be premature since only two – Portugal and Turkey, depicted in darker blue – meet Lijphart’s 20 year criteria to be considered “established democracies”. As shown in the

²⁸Malawi, which has bounced between +4 and +6 since 2000 was also once rated (tentatively) as democratic. In earlier Polity versions, Malawi reached +7 from 1994-2000, but the 2004 update revised those earlier codes to an incoherent +6.

²⁹Except for Russia (“not free”), the remainder are rated as “partly free” (PF) by Freedom House.

table, Portugal has been a democracy since 1976, just three years after its period as an established extreme autocracy ended in 1973. Turkey, rated only “partly free” by Freedom House and +7 by Polity, reached the benchmark of twenty years only in 2003, but its history of democracy is not so straightforward. As the table indicates, Turkey’s last established extreme autocracy ended in 1907 and its first coherent democracy appeared 39 years later in 1946. However, it has dropped from democratic status three times since then and its current democracy dates only from 1983, 75 years after its last extreme autocracy. Having achieved 20 years of continuous democracy, odds would now favor these two democracies surviving long-term, but it is worth noting that six established democracies of *more* than two decades duration have lost their democratic status during the last century, and only one has subsequently regained it.³⁰

Table 4: 9 EEAs, now coherent democracies

Current status	Polity	Freedom House	First year of Coherent Democracy	Last year of Est. Ext. Autocracy	Years from EEA to democracy
Albania	+7	+4	2002	1989	13
Mexico	+8	+7	2000	1912	88
Russia	+7	-5	2000	1904	96
Guatemala	+8	0	1996	1920	76
Dom Rep.	+8	+7	1996	1960	36
Thailand	+9	+4	1992	1931	61
Bulgaria	+9	+9	1990	1917	73
Portugal	+10	+10	1976	1973	3
Turkey	+7	+4	1946/1983	1907	39/75

Democratic consolidation is far from secure in the remaining seven countries because they have achieved democracy only in the 1990's or later. Bulgaria barely qualifies under the twelve year durability standard invoked by Gasiorowski and Power (1998) as a significant inflection point. Przeworski et al. (2000) find an average age at demise of 8.5 years for democracies.³¹ An analysis of the 53 losses of democratic status cited above (by 43 nations) reveals the average age of the democratic polity at death was about 10 years, and the median age about eight.

Thus, at least six of the nations in Table 4, having not yet passed estimates of the half-life of a failed democratic polity, are much too fragile and short-lived to inspire confidence that they have achieved democratic consolidation. Indeed, one which looked promising in 2004 has already fallen: Thailand experienced a serious constitutional crisis followed by a military coup in 2006. Russia also exemplifies this precarious quality, having achieved +7 only from 2000-2004, and

³⁰ This does not include several European countries whose democracy was interrupted by World War II occupation.

³¹ Each uses a different democracy measure and covers only the post-1970 period. Gasiorowski and Power note that only 37% of new democracies survived twelve years, but, among those that did, 69% survived another ten years and 62% another twenty. Przeworski et al. (1996) deny that the passage of time helps a democracy “consolidate”, arguing that the likelihood of collapse does not decline with age, but only with increasing development.

numerous commentators have expressed wariness over the increasing centralization of power in the Putin administration subsequently. Freedom House rated Russia as only “partly free” from 1990 to 2003, ceased to consider it an “electoral democracy” at all after the December 2003 election and has coded it as “not free” since then. Albania reached +7 only in 2002 – a year in which it went through three prime ministers and two presidents – and Freedom House has also rated it only “partly free”. Mexico reached +8 in 2000 (and was rated “free” only in 2001). In 1996, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala both reached +8, but the former, which also had a two-month democracy in 1963, became “free” only in 1999 and Guatemala, which has never escaped “partly free” status, was downgraded further in 2003. None are a sure bet to survive in a democratic form.

So, *what are the odds that Iraq will become an established democracy in the foreseeable future?* Only two of thirty established extreme autocracies have done so to date, but six others are now coherent democracies with a chance to reach the twenty year standard during this cycle. Although it is impossible to know how many of those will become “established” before collapsing, an estimate of somewhere around three or four seems reasonable, if speculative. Just under 60% of all twentieth century democracies remain today, though many of those are not yet established. A slightly smaller estimate is obtained based on Gasiorowski’s findings that two-thirds of those that have reached age 12 will reach age 20 and about one-third of the younger ones will also do so. Adding these projections to the two already established democracies gives us an estimate that about one out of five or six established extreme autocracies either already has, or in the foreseeable future will become, established democracies.³²

How long will it take for democracy to make its first appearance in Iraq? Table 4 shows that the transit from an established extreme autocracy to the achievement of the first coherent democracy – *if it occurs at all* – ordinarily requires more than half a century, *not* counting the long consolidation process. It required more than 70 years in five of the nine and less than 25 in only two. Depending on how you treat Turkey, which failed to sustain any of its first three democracies, the average transit period was 53.9 or 57.9 years; the median was 61 or 73. Fully a

³² Even those current democracies which suffer a future relapse to autocracy or incoherence may *eventually* become established democracies, of course. But if they do not complete the process before another decline occurs, they will lie beyond a horizon of twenty years which seems a reasonable approximation of “the foreseeable future”.

third of those nine – Russia, Guatemala, and Bulgaria – also fell back into *extreme* autocracy for substantial periods after first escaping it, and required about half a century to reach democracy even after exiting for the *last* time (more than 70 years after emerging initially).³³

Only Portugal and perhaps Albania made the transit to a coherent democracy from an established extreme autocracy in less than twenty-five years. Portugal is the only unequivocal success story in that its run of extreme autocracy (-9) from 1930-1973 transformed quickly to coherent democracy, with a +9 in 1976 and a +10 in 1982-2003. Still, its history is hardly comparable to Iraq's since it had previously experienced coherent democracy from 1911 to 1925. Polity recognizes Albania's fledgling democracy only from July of 2002, 12 years after a generational extreme autocracy ended, and it remains only "partly free". Certainly the transition from extreme autocracy to coherent democracy – for the small minority who have made it at all – is better measured in decades than in years. In round figures, the average is about half a century. Add another two to four decades for that democracy to become consolidated.

The central proposition is confirmed: a history of established extreme autocracy clearly casts an enormous shadow over subsequent democratization. Among this group, democratic transitions are rare, precarious, frequently temporary, and inevitably protracted.

5. The structural potential for democracy

Since history provides so few instances of established extreme autocracies progressing rapidly to democracy and so many that have failed to do so, optimism for Iraq must rest on evidence that Iraq's potential for democracy resembles the former group more than the latter. Such evidence might be sought in a detailed ideographic analysis, but that effort is beyond the bounds of this study and is available elsewhere (Haradstveit and Hveem, 2005). However, a combination of existing theory on democratization and social science methods that render it predictive can also provide some insight – by identifying the factors that have been associated

³³ Bulgaria took 73 years from its last established extreme autocracy in 1917, but also reverted to extreme autocracy 1935-1942. Guatemala took 76 years from 1920, but also experienced extreme autocracy 1932-1943. Russia took 96 years from its established extreme autocracy and 48 years since the 19year extreme autocracy of Stalin. A fourth country, Iran (from Table 3) also re-entered an established extreme autocracy from 1955-1978 after exiting an established extreme autocracy in 1905.

with democracy and democratization elsewhere.

Since Lipset's (1959) seminal effort at uncovering the "social requisites of democracy", scores of studies have achieved consensus on the structural factors associated with it. Democracy is most common in nations which are wealthy (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994), especially when its relatively egalitarian distribution (Muller, 1988) is manifested in high levels of education and health (Lipset, 1959; Diamond, 1992), and when strong middle and working classes emerge as political forces (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Doorenspleet, 2004). Economies that are poor and/or dominated by the so-called "curse of natural resources" (especially oil wealth and primary product production) are much more likely to be autocratic (Ross, 2001). Diffusion of democratic values and institutions results in a strong regional clustering of political systems (Starr and Lindborg, 2003; O'Loughlin et al., 1998; Wejnert, 2005), which is reinforced by the regional clustering of underlying cultural values (Welzel et al., 2003). Muslim countries are especially prone to autocracy (Lewis, 1996; Feng and Zak, 1999). A history of British colonialism inclines nations toward later democracy (Lipset et al., 1993; Bernhard et al., 2004). Studies have also found democracy to be hampered by ethnic, language, and religious divisions (Alesina et al., 2003), by peripheral status in the world system (Bollen, 1983; Van Rossem, 1996), and by external threat (Colaresi and Thompson, 2003).³⁴

Many alternative regression models culled from this literature incorporate these factors in different ways, as the studies cited above (and many others) demonstrate. The small differences between them may be consequential for theory testing, but for our predictive purposes all of them produce about equal explanatory power and very similar estimates of the democratic potential of both Iraq and other nations.³⁵ Table 5 illustrates a typical structural specification, chosen for its fit, compactness, and the size of the sample with available data.³⁶

³⁴ More narrow factors include the tendency of Presidential systems to fail more often than Parliamentary ones (Diskin et al., 2005) and for both democracies and autocracies to be more stable during periods of stable economic growth (Przeworski et al., 1996, 2000).

³⁵ Barro (1999), for example, projects democracy in 1995 on the basis of a regression that uses Freedom House rather than Polity data, some 30 independent variables, and a different estimation technique. Nevertheless, the correlation between his projection and one derived from the regression reported in Table 6 is .82, markedly higher than the correlation between the actual and fitted values in either analysis (.74 for this specification and .72 for Barro's) and only a bit below the .92 correlation between Polity and his democracy measure. Variations in model specification are not significant for our purposes.

³⁶ For the robustness of this specification and its essential similarity to those found elsewhere in the literature, see

The strongest predictor of democracy is the average level of democracy of one's contiguous neighbors, which no doubt reflects not only diffusion processes, but also picks up variance that appears as regional effects in other studies.³⁷ School enrollment, which contains a distributional component faithful to the more sophisticated formulations of the modernization perspective, improves on the fit of alternative measures of economic development such as GDP per capita.³⁸ The

Table 5: Predicting Polity 2004 from "social requisites"

	Estimate	t
School enrollment	.03*	2.15
Democratic neighbors	.43***	4.68
Oil exporter	-3.54**	-2.92
Primary product exporter	-2.34*	-2.39
Muslim population	-4.74***	-3.86
Post 1989 state	-1.96	-1.74
constant	2.81*	2.26
N / r ²	154/.535	

* p <.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

strongest negative impacts are a Muslim population, oil and primary product exports, and a dummy variable that recognizes that nations achieving their independence after 1989 have not yet had time to achieve the democratic level which their structural conditions should produce at equilibrium.³⁹ Nations with predominantly Muslim populations, on average, have a Polity score nearly five points lower than would otherwise be expected, and reliance on oil exports subtracts another three and a half points from expectations.⁴⁰

All of these results are squarely in line with previous studies. Variables that sometimes appear in similar models, but did not significantly improve the fit of this one, include world-system status, ethnic fractionalization, and various colonialism and regional dummies.⁴¹ Structural factors explain about 54% of the variance in actual democracy levels, with another 46% left to be

Xxxx, 2005). All nations with data for 2004, the most recent year available from Polity, are included. To maximize the generality of the result, Polity scores for seven nations are imputed from their one and two-year lagged values and Freedom House scores, but the estimation is virtually identical with those nations omitted.

³⁷ The average score was constructed with the aid of the Correlates of War Contiguity Data, version 3.0 (Stinnett et al., 2002). Only nations separated by a land or river border are considered contiguous. Nations with no contiguous neighbors (islands) are assigned the average score of their region, as designated by Minorities at Risk (2005).

³⁸ School enrollments are based on gross secondary school enrollment percentages taken from World Development Indicators. Missing data for 2004 was imputed from earlier years in several cases. Using GDP per capita instead of enrollments allows a slightly larger N, but it produces a poorer fit. The coefficient estimates of the other variables are not significantly effected by that choice.

³⁹ The Muslim percentage of the population and the dummy variable for Oil (defined as more than 1/3 of exports consisting of fuels) was taken from Fearon and Laitin (2003), augmented by CIA(2005), and World Bank (2001), which was also the source for the primary product export dummy.

⁴⁰ For a denial that these findings justify pessimism concerning Arab democracy, see Gambill (2003).

⁴¹ These null findings occur because the predictors, though theoretically divergent, are empirically colinear.

explained by the effects of political actors that are emphasized by the process tradition, by the hysteresis elaborated above, and by other unique elements of individual cases. When that powerful hysteresis effect is represented by the Polity score lagged ten years, the composite model explains about 74% of the variance and the significance of the structural factors is dramatically attenuated.⁴²

This “social requisites” model of the determinants of democracy is useful to us for several purposes. First, we can use this structural model as a control to more formally test the supposition that has been guiding our inquiry up until now – that a nation’s previous status as an established extreme autocracy impedes future democratization. Though it is clear from the earlier analyses that EEAs are significantly less likely to become democratic over any time frame, we have not definitively isolated that hysteresis effect from the (partially colinear) structural conditions which also predict democracy.

To do so, we add to the structural analysis of Table 5 a binary variable that takes the value 1 if a nation was an established extreme autocracy in a previous year. For example, the coefficient of -6.01 in the first column of Table 6 indicates that, on

Table 6: Predicting Polity 2004 from current “social requisites” and lagged Extreme Established Autocracy

	estimate	t	est.	t	est.	t	est.	t
School enrollment	0.04	2.65	0.04	2.46	0.04	2.96	0.03	2.12
Democratic neighbors	0.40	4.44	0.41	4.16	0.36	3.56	0.44	3.99
Oil exporter	-2.53	-1.96	-3.34	-2.27	-3.31	-2.23	-3.49	-2.40
Primary product exporter	-2.07	-2.17	-2.08	-2.03	-1.65	-1.57	-1.38	-1.25
Muslim population	-4.04	-3.31	-3.58	-2.73	-4.04	-2.98	-4.01	-2.77
Post 1989 state	-2.28	-2.06						
Extreme established autocracy	1994 (-10 years)	-6.01	-2.97					
	1984 (-20 years)			-3.23	-2.11			
	1974 (-30 years)					-3.40	-2.42	
	1964 (-40 years)							-2.24 -1.43
constant	2.30	1.86	2.30	1.78	1.71	1.26	2.21	1.57
N / r squared	153/.564		128/.553		121/.576		106/.573	

average, nations that had been established extreme autocracies 10 years earlier (in 1994) had 2004 scores about 6 points lower than other nations, even after controlling for their current “social requisites” of democracy. How long does this extreme autocratic baggage impede

⁴² This result lends credence to an interactive formulation in which elite actions must occur in the context of supportive structural conditions (Doorenspleet, 2004). Elite initiatives may highlight democratic transitions, but they cannot really hasten them. As Bunce (2000:708) puts it, “elites are seen as summarizers of long-term developments and as well-positioned representatives of larger social forces.”

democratization? The remainder of the table indicates that nations that had been established extreme autocracies 20 years prior to 2004 were still more than 3 points lower than would otherwise be predicted, and those that had been EEA 30 years earlier were nearly 3 and a half points lower.⁴³ Beyond thirty years, the parameter estimates remain negative but are no longer statistically significant.⁴⁴ In short, it appears that established extreme autocracy significantly impedes democratization for at least thirty years, a finding consistent with the earlier historical analysis.⁴⁵

Second, the structural analysis can be used as a control model to investigate other factors that might affect democratic prospects in particular cases. Since neither Iraq’s political history nor its social requisites point to rapid democratization, optimism that Iraq will escape its apparently autocratic fate must stem from attributes

Table 7: U.S. Involvement in Predicting Polity score, 2004

N = 154	Coef.	t	Coef.	t	Coef.	t
School enrollment	.03	2.15	.03	2.13	.03	2.13
Democratic neighbors	.43	4.68	.43	4.67	.45	4.73
Post-1989 state	-1.96	-1.74	-1.92	-1.68	-1.89	-1.66
Oil exporter	-3.54	-2.92	-3.50	-2.86	-3.42	-2.78
Primary product exporter	-2.34	-2.39	-2.33	-2.37	-2.23	-2.25
Muslim population	-4.74	-3.86	-4.69	-3.77	-4.52	-3.59
U.S. involvement			.50	.32		
short-term					3.09	.88
long-term					-.08	-.04
constant	2.81	2.26	2.75	2.17	2.60	2.03
R-squared	.535		.535		.538	

unique to it, the most frequently cited of which is the American occupation. Lawson and Thacker (2003) identify nineteen previous instances in which “the United States has occupied or help to occupy countries in the last century with the goal of reshaping their political system”, fifteen of which are coded by Polity.⁴⁶ Table 7 reports the results when Lawson and Thacker’s dummy

⁴³ The post 1989 state dummy variable was removed since new states were omitted from the analysis by virtue of missing data on the existence of an EEA at the earlier time point. Including these states by assigning them the values of their predecessor states does not significantly effect the model estimates.

⁴⁴In analyses not shown, it is found that established extreme autocracies underperformed extreme autocracies that were not established by two to six points. The basic results are virtually identical if new states – such as the former Soviet republics – are included by assigning them the prior score of their predecessor states.

⁴⁵ Of course, it is not identical to the 50 year estimate we obtained on the different and more particular question of how long it takes to transit to coherent democracy.

⁴⁶They consider Bosnia, Cambodia, Somalia, and South Korea as instances of “truncated or incomplete intervention” whereas Austria, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Germany, Haiti, Japan, Nicaragua, Panama, Philippines and South Vietnam “experienced more thoroughgoing and protracted occupation.” Grenada, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau are too small to be coded by Polity.

variables reflecting American involvement are added to the model of Table 5. It mirrors their finding that American occupation has not made a significant difference, and confirms that it is robust by estimating a different equation over a different sample.

Finally, this “social requisites” model can be used as a prediction equation to estimate the level of democracy/autocracy that should be expected for any nation, including Iraq, given its structural characteristics. That prediction might be plausibly said to represent a nation’s “structural potential for democracy”, the level that might be achieved if other barriers, such as the hysteresis from past autocracy or the influence of a single individual, could somehow be removed. Optimists might thus interpret the gap between a nation’s predicted score and its actual performance – the regression residual – as the potential for relatively rapid improvement, over, say, the next twenty years.

To test the face validity of that premise, the structural model of Table 5 was estimated for 1984 and the regression residual compared with actual democratization two decades later.⁴⁷ Two

points are immediately obvious from Table 8. First, the nations with the largest gap between predicted and actual levels of democracy did, indeed, subsequently “catch up” to their structural conditions. The first row singles out the twenty nations with the largest negative residuals in 1984 –those with the highest unfulfilled potential for democratization. All had actual Polity scores at -6 or lower in 1984, even though they were projected to have scores anywhere from 5.6 to 12.2 points above that level.

Table 8 - Structural potential, 1984 and subsequent democratization

Gap in structural potential, 1984	Total	Status, 2004	
		Not Coherent Democracy	Coherent Democracy
20 largest gaps	20	5	15
Others, -6 and below	54	51	3

By 2004, all but Cuba had become more democratic and an extraordinary 15 of those 20 had become coherent democracies. Seven countries, under the sway of a Communist party supported by the Red Army in 1984, best illustrate the optimist’s scenario: With the disappearance of that unique impediment, but with the social requisites of democracy otherwise largely in place, each achieved a coherent democracy by 2004.

Second, these particular episodes of rapid transformation should *not* be taken to refute the well established fact that democratic change is *usually* a highly path dependent process exhibiting

⁴⁷ Of course, the dummy variable for post-1989 state was removed as a predictor. With an N=129, the r² was .429.

very strong hysteresis. Beyond the twenty with the greatest unfulfilled structural potential, fifty four other nations also had Polity scores of -6 or below in 1984. Among them was Iraq, whose residual of -1.8 signified that it was about as autocratic as its structural conditions predicted, even without taking into account the singular effect of Saddam Hussein. As the second row of Table 8 shows, only *three* of those 54 had become coherent democracies by 2004. Obviously, democratization does occur – even in autocracies – but overwhelmingly among those states with structural conditions that favor it.

6. A composite projection

We can use this logic, together with the composite model of Table 6 and past probabilities, to offer one last estimate of the likelihood of future democracy in Iraq. The regression reported in Table 6, which combined current social requisites of democracy with the hysteresis of established extreme autocracy twenty years earlier (1984), projected Iraq to score -7.9 in 2004, not far from its actual level of -9. Table 9, which lists the ten nations that are predicted to have the *lowest* levels of democracy by that composite model, tells us that only three states across the globe have histories and structural conditions *less* favorable to democracy today than Iraq.⁴⁸ Clearly, rapid democratization in Iraq would have required a very substantial over-achievement, the magnitude and likelihood of which can be crudely estimated. Assuming that the models linking these factors with

**Table 9: Predicted Autocracies
Predicted/Actual Polity scores, 2004**

Country	Actual	Predicted	Residual
Bahrain	-7	-8.4	1.4
Saudi Arabia	-10	-8.2	-1.8
Qatar	-10	-7.9	-2.1
Iraq	-9*	-7.9	-1.1
Oman	-8	-7.3	-0.7
UAE	-8	-5.9	-2.1
Algeria	2	-5.8	7.8
Afghanistan	-4	-5.5	1.5
Syria	-7	-5.2	-1.7
Kuwait	-7	-4.8	-2.2

* prior to occupation

⁴⁸ To the contrary, Byman and Pollock (2003: 124) conclude that “Iraq has a reasonably good foundation to make the transition” on the basis of income, literacy rates, and urbanization, factors identified by the structural analysis of Barro (1999). “Iraq’s numbers are comparable to those of many other states that have enjoyed real progress in the transition from autocracy to democracy, such as Bangladesh, Kenya, and Bolivia.” This conclusion is a serious misreading of Barro, who explicitly projects democracy scores (on a 0 to 1 scale) using a much broader prediction equation than the factors cited by Byman and Pollock. Barro’s projections for Bangladesh (.55), Bolivia (.51), and Kenya (.40), indicate that Iraq has nowhere near their structural requisites. In fact, Iraq’s projection of .04 is, by a very wide margin, the very lowest suitability rating for democracy of any nation in his 101 country sample. The next lowest is Zaire (.16).

democratization remain as stable in the future as they have over the last several decades, that effort will yield one final clue as to the odds required for Iraq to attain coherent democracy despite adverse history and structural conditions.

We first observe that to achieve a Polity score of +7 Iraq would have required a positive residual 14.9 points above the -7.9 potential predicted by the composite analysis. How common is “over-achievement” of that magnitude? Since the largest positive residual in 2004 belonged to Senegal (8.9), coherent democracy under Iraq’s structural conditions would constitute the largest deviation from prediction in the world today – by a very wide margin. Indeed, based on the normal distribution, a deviation the size of Senegal’s should occur in about 2.6% of cases, but a residual of 14.9 should appear in only about .058% of cases, or about 1 in 1725 – a decidedly more pessimistic assessment than emerged from our earlier analysis.

Furthermore, none of the successful democratic transitions identified in our earlier historical analysis bucked odds approaching that range. Table 10 lists the nine former established extreme autocracies and the four former Soviet republics that are now coherent democracies. The largest residual, Albania’s 6.3, should occur in more than 8% of cases. Most display much smaller residuals, indicating that they are modest over-achievers, but far from miracles. Notwithstanding recent waves of democratization, democracy still has social requisites.⁴⁹

Table 10: Democratic Transitions Predicted/Actual Polity scores, 2004

Country	Actual	Predicted	Residual
Mexico	8	8.8	-0.8
Portugal	10	10.3	-0.3
Moldova	8	8.0	0.0
Bulgaria	9	8.8	0.2
Latvia	8	7.3	0.7
Georgia	7	6.1	0.9
Lithuania	10	7.8	2.2
Guatemala	8	4.9	3.1
Russia	7	3.1	3.9
Turkey	7	2.4	4.6
Dom Rep.	8	3.1	4.9
Thailand	9	3.9	5.1
Albania	7	0.7	6.3

7. Conclusion: Democratic prospects in Iraq

Can Iraq democratize? Only time will tell, but our historical analysis reveals that just nine out of thirty comparable cases have made it at all, and odds are that nearly half of them will not last without at least one further relapse. About the same number remain coherent autocracies, with no move whatever toward democratization discernible, even decades after extreme

⁴⁹ There is some indication that the wave has abated over the last decade, but the trends are not very clear (Diamond, 1996; Doorenspleet, 2000; Modelski and Perry, 2002).

autocracies ended. This estimated likelihood of around 20% (5 or 6 out of 30) is, by far, the most optimistic that can be squared with evidence from comparable cases.

A consideration of the structural conditions derived from existing theory not only leaves intact the cautionary reminder of the broader historical record, but suggests that the prior experience of others may offer an overly *optimistic* estimate of Iraq's prospects. The successful democratizers were marked by structural conditions that strongly presaged democratization, whereas Iraq is notable for structures that are extremely unfavorable for democracy. Remarkably, the conclusion that Iraq is among the handful of states *least* likely to democratize – perhaps one chance in 1725 – does not even require any reference to those conditions which most commentators regard as Iraq's biggest challenges – the insurgency, ethnic rivalry, and external influences! Certainly it is difficult to see how conditions on the ground in Iraq today would boost its prospects relative to success stories like Portugal, Albania, or Lithuania. The latter two, like most of the successful cases in Table 10, may not have occurred without the break-up of the old Soviet empire.

How long will it take? The most optimistic observer will find scant evidence in the historical record that a democratic transition is imminent in Iraq. About half a century seems to be the average among those that have made it, however tentatively. But more time than that has elapsed among many that have not. Even the successes require two or more decades beyond the initial appearance to become consolidated. The burden of proof surely must shift to those who are optimistic about progress in the foreseeable future, and the burden they face is to show that Iraq is better situated than most – that Iraq is more like Portugal, the only nation to transit quickly, than Saudi Arabia, which shows no signs of doing so.

The chances of democracy appearing under current structural conditions in Iraq appear extremely remote. The past experience of Middle Eastern countries suggests that when democracy finally comes to Iraq, few Iraqis alive today will be there to greet it. The experience of the Soviet Union suggests that by the time democracy reaches parts of Mesopotamia, it will no longer be Iraq.

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Appendix: Coding and comparing autocracies

Iraq’s score of -9, which results from subtracting its 9 on autocracy from its 0 on democracy, can be reconstructed from Table A1. For example, Saddam Hussein was appointed President and Chairperson of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in 1979 by the RCC itself. The chief executive’s

Table A1: Decomposing Iraq's Autocracy		Dem	Auto
Components		0	9
executive recruitment regulation	designated, not regulated		
exec recruitment competitiveness	selection, not election	0	2
executive recruitment openness	open, not hereditary	0	0
executive constraints	unlimited authority	0	3
participation regulation	restricted		2
participation competitiveness	repressed, no opposition	0	2

selection by designation, not election, contributes two points toward Iraq’s autocracy score, as illustrated in the boldface line of Table A1. By contrast, the recruitment via contested election that marks democratic states, would have incremented the democracy score by +2.

The powers of the executive in Iraq are unlimited by either statutory arrangement or challenge from other institutions, adding three points to its autocracy score. Polity’s notes describe why their coders judged it so: “The Chairman of the RCC serves as chief executive, prime minister, and commander of the armed forces. The RCC exercises both legislative and executive power, whereas the elected legislature (National Assembly) can only enact laws approved by the RCC. The judiciary is not independent, and the president can override any court decision.”

Political participation by the public is repressed and no opposition is permitted, accumulating four more points on the autocracy scale. “Any formal political activity must be sanctioned by the government. Opposition to the regime is silenced by an efficient security force that maintains an environment of intimidation and fear on which government power rests. The government continues to execute perceived political opponents and to torture and kill individuals suspected of (or even related to persons suspected of) anti-state crimes. The authorities routinely used arbitrary arrest and detention, and security forces routinely torture, beat, rape, and otherwise abuse detainees. In 1995, as the sole candidate, Hussein was approved by a reported 99.9% of the electorate in a poll that did not provide for secret ballots and was widely considered a sham.”

Thus, Iraq exhibits almost all the characteristics of a pure autocracy - an unelected, unconstrained executive and an absence of political participation - and consequently scores 9 on the autocracy scale. The comparison with the other severe autocracies in Appendix Table A2 reveals that the only missing element that deprives Iraq of the pure autocracy score of 10 assigned to Saudi Arabia and Qatar is the hereditary character of

their monarchies. In both Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the executive is designated from within a group formally closed to the general public – the royal family – rather than from a group that is formally open – the power brokers that designated Saddam Hussein in 1978. It is not obvious that this difference has major consequences for the subsequent evolution of the political system.

Table A2 also illustrates that Iraq’s profile is identical to that of three other extreme autocracies: North Korea, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The seventh is Swaziland, a hereditary monarchy whose minimal constraint on executive power – ostensible legislative approval of the king’s nomination of the prime minister and cabinet– affords it a -9 rather than -10.

Table A2: Comparing Extreme Autocracies

	Democracy	Autocracy	Executive Recruitment			Participation		
			Regulation	Competitive	Openness	Constraints	Regulation	Competitiveness
Iraq	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
North Korea								
Uzbekistan	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
Turkmenistan								
Saudi Arabia	0	10	3	1	1	1	4	1
Qatar								
Swaziland	0	9	3	1	2	2	4	1

Table A3: Comparing Iraq with other autocracies

	Democracy	Autocracy	Executive Recruitment				Participation	
			Regulation	Competitive	Openness	Constraints	Regulation	Competitiveness
Iraq	0	9	2	1	4	1	4	1
China								
Syria								
Myanmar	0	7	2	1	4	3	4	1
Viet Nam								
Laos								
USSR (1987)								
Belarus								
Zimbabwe								
Azerbaijan	0	7	2	1	4	2	4	2
Eritrea								
Oman	0	8	3	1	1	2	4	2
U Arab Emr	0	8	3	1	2	3	4	1
Bhutan	0	8	3	1	2	2	4	2
Bahrain	0	7	3	1	1	2	3	2
Kuwait	0	7	3	1	2	3	4	2
Cuba	0	7	2	0	0	1	4	1
Libya	0	7	1	0	0	1	4	1

Table A3 offers a contrast between the Polity codes of Iraq and those of coherent – but *not* extreme – autocracies. Thirteen of them are scored -7, with most distinguished from Iraq in one or both of two key respects. The most common configuration is that of China, Syria, Myanmar, Viet Nam, Laos and the Soviet Union (1953- 1987), each of which has markedly greater constraints on executive authority than Iraq. Belarus, Zimbabwe, Azerbaijan, and Eritrea also have executive constraints greater than Iraq, and repress political participation less severely as well. Even the hereditary monarchies which score -8 – Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Bhutan – feature greater constraints on executive authority than Iraq (as do Bahrain and Kuwait), and all but the UAE allow somewhat greater political participation also. Only the idiosyncratic cases of Cuba and Libya have political participation and executive authority similar to that of Iraq.